



**US Army Corps
of Engineers®**
Detroit District

OCTOBER 28, 2008

www.lre.usace.army.mil

Public Service Message

Release No. PA-102808

For Release: Immediate

Contact: Lynn Duerod 313-226-4680

Cell phone 313-300-0662

Lynn.Duerod@us.army.mil

Everyone is cautioned to stay off piers and breakwaters during high winds, storms or high wave action

'NOT DESIGNED FOR PUBLIC ACCESS. PROCEED AT YOUR OWN RISK'

is a message that is on a familiar sign near local piers, asking the public to stay off these structures.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Detroit District's first concern is the public's safety. So the District strongly urges people to use common sense and caution when it comes to the breakwaters, piers or jetties in the Great Lakes. The District recommends caution if people go out on piers. They are to watch weather conditions and wave action. And, do not swim near or jump off piers and breakwaters because "the life you save may be your own."

However, some people continue to walk on, jump off and swim near piers without realizing the possibly fatal risks. Most accidents and incidents near piers occur during the turbulent weather season from late August through December. Many people—especially those from in-land communities—are not aware that storms or high winds can occur rapidly, not giving people the time needed to leave piers quickly and get to safer ground. Weather conditions during this time can cause waves to break over the top of the structure, and they are often strong enough to knock anyone off a pier.

"It's truly a tragedy when someone gets hurt or dies as a result of going out on the piers especially when there are safety precautions available including the warning signs posted on the grounds near the structures," said Tom O'Bryan, the Detroit District's water safety coordinator.

Besides getting knocked off a pier, the weight of the water in a wave can amount to several tons, and that alone can cause serious injury. In addition, the waves or spray from the waves make the structure slick. All of these factors combine to make a trip to the pier a risky proposition. Furthermore, even low waves rushing over a person's feet can knock them down, and cause a situation where they are unable to react.

-- more --

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Detroit District civil works program encompasses 82,000 square miles of land inhabited by about 14 million people in Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. The Corps operates and/or maintains 94 harbors. Its mission includes real estate transactions, flood control, regulatory activities, disaster response, and mobilization readiness.

Pier safety 2-2-2

It's beautiful, but dangerous.

Fishermen, swimmers, nature lovers, and sightseers all love the beauty and thrill of walking on a pier. However, the piers were mainly designed and built for ship navigation safely, and not for people to walk on, sit, swim, or jump from them. The beauty and majesty of the waves crashing and spraying against the breakwaters, piers and jetties mask the real dangers. People should stay off these structures because they pose various dangers—slick surfaces, jagged and sharp edges, and undertow along with stones beneath the water's surface, according to the Corps.

Designed for protection.

While the Corps of Engineers has tried to make the piers aesthetically pleasing, jetties on the Great Lakes are designed to assist large ships entering the harbor, especially in rough weather. According to the Corps, piers and breakwaters are designed to reduce wave action in the channel and harbors. That means these structures or barriers will withstand up to about 50 years of pounding waves, several feet of piled ice, and even an occasional ship collision with the pier. Their pleasing design hides their robust nature. In fact, just like an iceberg, most of a pier is below murky water. And just like an iceberg, the pleasant view above the water disguises the danger below.

Dangers below.

Enormous armor stones—quarried stone buttressing the pier or breakwater—provide support for the structure's steel and concrete, and are hidden beneath the foamy, cloudy waves. Individually, these stones weigh between one and 40 tons. Danger is present whether the water is high or low, but current low waters make the situation more dangerous. If someone falls into the water they run the risk of slamming into these huge stones or getting wedged between them below the water's surface.

While many people, who fell off these structures, felt they were very good swimmers, the reality of the statistics paint a far different picture. Several victims said they were in good shape and were very good swimmers, but they were no match for the fury of the wave action.

For more information ask for a free copy of "Respect the Power" video/DVD at the Corps of Engineer's Lake Michigan Area office in Grand Haven, Dave Foster at 616-842-5510, or call Lynn Duerod, at the district headquarters Public Affairs Office in Detroit, at 313-226-4680. Also, visit the Detroit District's homepage at <http://www.lre.usace.army.mil>.

Corps of Engineers

Safety Precautions—

- Closely supervise your children
- Life jackets should be worn when on the pier
- Do not dive off or swim around pier structures
- Stay off piers during high winds or when waves are washing over
- Avoid walking upon wet slippery areas
- Stay away from the edge
- Do not run or climb upon pier structures

Note: Local ordinances may prohibit swimming in navigational channels

**** We encourage you to get the free “Respect the Power” DVD, which can be reproduced and passed along to your friends and loved ones.

###